

AUDIO

FAQ

Q What kind of damage can headphones do to your hearing?

A The problem with headphones is that it's tempting to turn up the volume to make your music easier to hear when you're somewhere loud. Londoners often resort to using high volumes while on the tube to drown out background noise.

The more loud music you listen to, the worse the effect is likely to be on your hearing. Potential problems include hearing loss and tinnitus, which is a ringing sound in your ears. The way to avoid these problems is to reduce your listening volume.

An iPod with the audio limiter turned on can produce audio at 100dBA, which is recommended for a maximum listening period of just 3¾ minutes. Turning the volume down to 85dBA increases the maximum recommended listening period to eight hours.

Of course, with the volume turned down, you'll often be unable to hear your music, which is why you should choose your headphones carefully. Active noise reduction headphones can help, but custom sleeves (see review, opposite) in effect work like earplugs, which means you can turn your MP3 player's volume right down.

Kat Orphanides

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SAMSUNG YP-T10

★★★★★

£59 inc VAT

From www.advancedmp3players.co.uk

Samsung's YP-T10 is the successor to the Best Buy-winning YP-T9, so we had high expectations. It looks like a more angular version of the second-generation iPod Nano, while its brushed metal-effect back and glossy face feel tough and durable. The player has an illuminated touchpad, which remains dark when not in use. Seven touch-keys allow you to select tracks and move between menus, and a sliding switch on the side of the device is both the power and hold key.

You have to turn the player on its side to watch videos, and the controls changed orientation to match. The YP-T10 isn't comfortable to hold in this position. Video looked excellent on the bright 320x240 screen, and we were pleased to see that it played successive videos without returning to the menu after each.

The biggest problem with most portable video players is converting files to a format they can play. The YP-T10 supports Samsung's proprietary SVI format and, more usefully, WMV video with a resolution of 320x240. This makes it easier to download or create your own content, although we'd have liked to see support for MPEG4 video too.

We had trouble copying WMV files to the player, as Samsung's Media Center application insisted on converting them to SVI. When we switched to Windows Explorer it warned us that neither WMV video nor OGG audio files would play on the YP-T10. Fortunately, this wasn't true and the files copied and played correctly.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent interface
- ✓ Good sound quality
- ✗ Trouble transferring OGG and WMV files

MP3 PLAYER 2GB capacity, 2in 320x240 LCD screen, supports MP3, WMA, OGG audio, WMV, SVI video, JPEG images, TXT documents, USB Hi-Speed interface
PART CODE YP-T10JQB
DETAILS www.samsung.com

PERFORMANCE (see www.computershopper.co.uk/howwetest)



The YP-T10 looks great, and its interface is a pleasure to use. Three graphical themes radically alter the appearance of menus and the visualisations that accompany audio tracks. It has plenty of features, including support for RSS and Podcast feeds, an FM radio and the best text file reader we've ever seen. Built-in Bluetooth enables you to stream music wirelessly to compatible headphones and speakers.

Audio quality was clear, and there are lots of options for those who want to tweak their sound. We noticed a slight hiss, audible only through high-end headphones, when navigating the menus, but it wasn't a problem when music was playing. The supplied headphones were fairly comfortable, but not particularly clear. Battery life was a very respectable four hours, 12 minutes for video and 18 hours for audio.

The YP-T10 sounds great and is a pleasure to use, but the difficulty with some file types and the faint background hiss keep it from a perfect score.

Kat Orphanides

Also consider...

SANDISK Sansa e280

★★★★★

£70 inc VAT

From www.onlinememory.co.uk



This classy 8GB MP3 player is great value.

It has an impressive battery life of 18 hours and 17 minutes. Its raised control wheel and menu system are easy to use and the 1.8in colour screen was free from graininess. Audio quality was consistently good, and the player is capable of higher volumes than most. Its sound was clear and undistorted, even when we bass-boosted the loudest settings. We were impressed by the speed and stability of the video-conversion software that accompanies the e280. An added bonus is that its storage capacity can be expanded via a microSD slot.

MP3 PLAYER 8GB capacity, supports MP3, WMA, WMA-DRM, JPEG and BMP images, MOV video (with limitations), USB Hi-Speed interface
PART CODE SDMX4-8192-A70
DETAILS www.sandisk.com
FULL REVIEW Nov 2007



ALBA PRDAB210MP3

★★★★★

£55 inc VAT

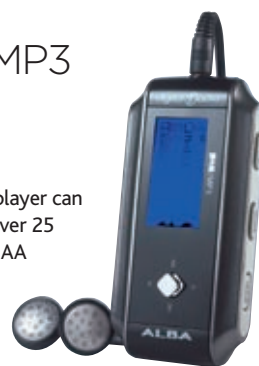
From www.laskys.com



Alba's 1GB MP3 player can be powered for over 25 hours by a single AA battery.

The PRDAB210MP3 is less style-conscious than many players, but it makes up for this with its sound quality and range of functions. It incorporates a digital DAB radio, and both radio and MP3 playback were loud, clear and distinct. The menu system is surprisingly sophisticated for such a simple device. A three-line LCD screen can display tracks in several ways, including by artist and the date they were transferred to the player. You can even choose whether the device connects to your computer as an MTP or a simple USB mass storage device.

MP3 PLAYER 1GB capacity, supports MP3, WMA, WMA-DRM, DAB radio, USB Hi-Speed interface
PART CODE PRDAB210MP3
DETAILS www.laskys.com
FULL REVIEW Nov 2007



ADVANCED COMMUNICATION SOLUTIONS

Custom Earphone Sleeves

★★★★★

£88 inc VAT

From www.hearingprotection.co.uk

Turning up your MP3 player so that you can hear your music better can seriously damage your hearing. A safer solution is to buy custom eartips for your in-ear headphones. These block external noise, which enables you to listen to music at lower volumes.

Advanced Communication Solutions sells moulds for a number of sound-isolating earphones. We tried

moulds for Etymotic Research's ER-Gi and Shure's SE310 sets (see Labs, page 121). The process involves visiting an audiologist, who makes moulds of your ears. This takes around 20 minutes. Two weeks later you'll receive your custom eartips, which you use to replace your headphones' existing eartips.

Putting them in your ear can be tricky at first, and you have to insert and turn them at the same time. A tube of comfort cream is provided to make it easier. Once in, they're very comfortable. They cut out background noise, improved sound quality and allowed us to reduce our iPod's volume by half.

If you don't have a set of compatible in-ear headphones, you can buy the moulds and a pair of Etymotic's ER-Gi earphones for £150 from www.customearphones.co.uk.

These earphone sleeves may seem pricy, but for the extra comfort, lower volumes and improvement in sound quality they're worth every penny.

Kat Orphanides



SUMMARY

- ✓ Protects your hearing
- ✓ Cuts out most background noise
- ✓ Very comfortable

CUSTOM EARPHONE SLEEVES Two silicon moulds, fits most Sure and Etymotic Research in-ear headphones
DETAILS www.hearingprotection.co.uk

M-AUDIO

Studiophile AV20

★★★★

£57 inc VAT

From www.dv247.com

The wooden cabinets of M-Audio's Studiophile AV20 speakers feel reassuringly heavy for a pair of desktop PC speakers. As well as the woofer and tweeter drivers that you'd expect, each speaker also has a bass reflex port at the back. This rounds out low notes and helps to create rich, deep bass tones.

The speakers produced plenty of volume when connected to a sound card, although the midrange sounded rather harsh when both our music source and the speakers were turned up to full. We also

found that music from our MP3 player lacked volume when we connected it to the speakers.

The overall sound was very balanced, with clear, precise mid-tones and high notes complemented by the strong bass. The speakers are easy to position for optimal listening, as you simply place them to face you on your desk.

The only control is the volume knob on the left speaker, which also bears stereo RCA sockets. The speakers come with a 3.5mm stereo-to-RCA lead, although you'll want to replace this if you're serious about audio quality. The Studiophile AV20 is a good set of computer speakers for anyone who uses their PC for a combination of gaming and entertainment, but they're quite expensive, particularly when compared with Logitech's X-230 set (see Also Consider... below).

Kat Orphanides



SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent sound quality
- ✓ Easy to position for optimal listening
- ✗ Expensive for PC speakers

SPEAKERS 2.0 configuration, 20W power, stereo RCA input
DETAILS www.m-audio.com

LOGITECH

X-230

★★★★★

£25 inc VAT

From www.ebuyer.com

Logitech's X-230 speakers are among our all-time favourites, with a sound that's clearer, richer and more balanced than any other set under £50, and a few that are more expensive. The volume and bass controls are on the right satellite and subwoofer respectively, and all the cables except power protrude from the right satellite. If you want a good set for music or games then there are no better speakers available at this price.



STEREO SPEAKERS 2.1 configuration, 32W power, 3.5mm stereo cable inputs PART CODE 970123-1120
DETAILS www.logitech.com FULL REVIEW Jun 2007

APPLE

iPod Nano

★★★★★

£129 inc VAT

From www.apple.com/uk

The latest version of Apple's iPod Nano combines great audio quality with a sharp 2in screen to create an outstanding multimedia player that's small enough to fit in the ticket pocket of a pair of jeans. It lasted over 30 hours in our audio battery test, and over five during video playback. Despite its mediocre headphones and its dependence on iTunes, the Nano exceeded our expectations with clear, rich sound at every setting and high-quality video rendition.



MP3 PLAYER 8GB capacity, supports MP3, Wav, AAC, Protected AAC, Audible, Apple Lossless and AIFF audio, JPEG images, H.264 and MPEG4 video (with limitations), USB Hi-Speed interface PART CODE MB257ZO/A
DETAILS www.apple.com/uk FULL REVIEW Dec 2007

IRHYTHMS

A-211

★★★★★

£93 inc VAT

From www.datakits.co.uk

2007 has been a busy year for iPod-docking speakers. They are ideal for enjoying your MP3 collection without having to switch on your PC. The compact designs most manufacturers favour aren't ideal for providing good sound quality, and the fee Apple charges for its Made for iPod certification means that most iPod-compatible speakers are poor value compared with standard PC speakers.

IRhythms' A-211 set bucks this trend. The conventional subwoofer-based design provides much deeper bass and louder overall volumes than all-in-one designs, and it produces very high-quality sound, making it well suited for use with iPods and computers.



IPOD DOCK SPEAKERS 2.1 configuration, 133W RMS power, compatible with all docking iPods and first-generation Shuffle, auxiliary line input PART CODE LN16326 DETAILS www.irhythms.com FULL REVIEW Oct 2007